

Draft Opening Remarks for Mike Stoker

Pacific Islands Environment Directors Meeting, June 19, 2018

[Opening ceremony begins at 8:30. Mike will follow John McCarroll's brief introduction. The allotted time for Mike is about 10 minutes, but flexible.]

- **[Welcome]**
 - Hello everybody. I want to give you a warm welcome to San Francisco.
 - I'm so happy to see you all here today.
 - I'm happy to be here myself.
 - I'm looking forward to meeting all of you, and getting to know you and your islands.
 - I'm especially looking forward to hearing how we can support you more.
- **[Personal connection]**
 - As you've probably heard, I just started here at EPA last month.
 - In my first week on the job, I met with Guam's Governor Eddie Calvo.
 - I'll tell you the same thing I told him: the Pacific islands have a special importance to me.
 - My grandfather was in the Seabees in Guam during WWII, and I grew up feeling a special connection with the Pacific Islands.
 - And as a resident of Santa Barbara, I also have a connection with the Pacific Ocean – just from the other side as you.
- **[More about my role as RA – (similar points as made during R9 all-hands)]**
 - Honor to be selected . . .
 - I take this job very seriously . . .
 - I see myself as an ambassador for the Region . . .
 - It's important for me to connect with as much of the Region as possible . . .
 - The Pacific islands are an important part of the Region. I hope to visit each of you.
 - I'm planning to visit American Samoa in August as part of the Coral Reef Task Force.
- **[Recognition & accomplishments]**
 - I'd like to thank Alexis Strauss for being an advocate for the Pacific Islands during her time as Acting Regional Administrator.
 - I'd also like to thank Jeff, Bridget and John, and our Pacific Islands Team, and the many other folks in this Region, who have been strong advocates for the Pacific islands.
 - I've learned that the partnership between EPA and the Pacific islands goes back a long way – nearly to the beginning of EPA Region 9.
 - I also heard about the good work you've done, and some of the big accomplishments we have made together in the Pacific over the past 15 years.
 - Drinking water is so much safer than it used to be 15 years ago. That's a major public health improvement.
 - Leptospirosis. In American Samoa, the risk from the disease Leptospirosis has been nearly eradicated. American Samoa EPA took a strong leadership role in that.
 - Wastewater and beaches. Wastewater spills have decreased by over 90% since the early 2000s, and beaches are safer – thanks again to teamwork from EPA and your offices.

- Solid waste handling has improved tremendously. Guam and CNMI have closed two large dumps, and opened compliant landfills. And Guam's recycling rate has jumped from 18% to 34%.
- **[Budget]**
- I'd like to talk for a moment about EPA's budget.
 - First, the FY18 budget – You're probably aware that after several Continuing Resolutions, our funding is now intact through the end of September.
 - We're in the FY19 budget process now, so we can't talk with certainty about next year.
 - I want to let you know the Administration's FY19 budget does propose cuts to EPA funding – including cuts to several of the funds we give to state and territorial EPAs.
 - But as we learned with the FY18 budget, Congress plays a major role in the budget process, and at least for FY18, Congress did not cut EPA's funding from prior levels.
 - The initial indications from Congress for FY19 are no major budget cuts to EPA grants.
 - In other words, we expect EPA's budget next year to look very similar to this year, other than internally we'll have a few less staff.
 - And if Congress doesn't pass a budget by September 30, we could start next fiscal year with another Continuing Resolution, which would also keep the status quo.
 - *[Note to Mike: Administration-proposed budget cuts would have severe impacts for the islands, with up to an overall 45% reduction in revenues to territories.]*
 - Even with all our budget uncertainties, I want to assure you the Pacific Islands will continue to be a priority for us at EPA.
- **[Closing]**
- In closing, I just want to say I am very happy that we are hosting you in San Francisco for this Pacific Islands Environment Directors meeting.
- In alignment with Administrator Scott Pruitt, our main job here is to support you – to help you do the job of protecting the environmental health of the Pacific Islands.
- The Pacific Islands will remain a priority for EPA for as long as I'm here.
- I look forward to seeing you over the next few days, and to working with you over the next several years to build upon our many great successes.
- Thank you again.